



JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

MAINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
55 CAPITOL STREET  
65 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE  
04333

KIRK F. MOHNEY  
DIRECTOR

## ***PLANNING AN ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY IN YOUR COMMUNITY***

---

### **I. SURVEY OVERVIEW**

#### **A. What is an architectural survey?**

- A systematic record of the built environment within a specified geographic area and time frame.
- A method to understand trends in building and design
- A process that documents the life cycle of a town

#### **B. Why undertake an architectural survey?**

- To document the built environment of a town at a particular point in time.
- To identify the built environment from previous time periods
- To identify properties and landscapes that contribute to the character of the town.
- To identify properties or areas worth of preservation, either through owner encouragement, town ordinances, or financial support.
- To identify properties or districts eligible for listing in the National Register.
- To help prioritize and plan for town growth and development.

#### **C. Who undertakes a survey?**

- Towns, Historical Societies, MHPC
- Volunteers and Professionals
- CRM companies and MDOT prior to Federally funded projects, such as gas lines or road widening.

#### **D. What can be recorded in a survey?**

- Building or structures including houses, barns, farms, churches, public buildings schools, industrial and commercial structures
- Cemeteries
- Parks, commons or green spaces
- Bridges, dams, weirs, pounds
- Statues, markers, fountains

#### **E. How is survey linked to the National Register?**

- The information collected via an architectural survey forms the basis for determining the eligibility of a National Register of Historic Places historic district. The surveys record visual, structural and historical information that can be evaluated against the National Register criteria; they help to identify trends in styles and design, chart neighborhood evolution, and illuminate structures or residents of significant historical importance.

### **II. METHODOLOGY: DESIGNING THE SURVEY.**

It is important to develop a clear plan of action and identify what is to be surveyed, by whom, for what purpose and how it will be done.

#### **A. Define the goals of the survey.**

- To establish or augment the historical record?

- For comprehensive plan or town planning?
- For anniversary or commemorations?
- To identify threatened properties or areas?
- To identify properties for nomination to the National Register?

**B. Identify the geographical area for the survey.**

- Should an entire town be surveyed? Neighborhood? County?
- If a large area is selected would it be best to look first at threatened resources?
- Can the survey be broken down into phases?
- Is there an already identified or potential historic district?
- Some surveys collect or update information on already identified or listed historic resources.

**C. Focus on a time period.**

- Most grant funded surveys collect information on all structures older than 50 years, but this standard should be specific to the goals of your project.

**D. Decide on what level of research is needed.**

It is recommended that the information collected and reported be consistent with other surveys to allow state wide comparisons. There are two basic levels of survey: the reconnaissance survey and the intensive survey. MHPC has developed forms that can be used with either level.

*1. Reconnaissance survey*

- This is a survey that takes a broad view and is used to define areas worthy of later, intensive survey.
- No need to gain access to interiors or rear of buildings
- The information collected is generally descriptive.
- Does not include substantial research
- a survey card is filled out for every structure over 50 years of age within the defined area.
- documentation of a building is accomplished using a set of pre-defined features on a standard form
- at least one photograph is taken of every property surveyed; additional photographs can be taken as necessary
- the surveyed properties are keyed to a tax map or topographic map

*2. Intensive survey*

- In an intensive survey, the goal is to document historic buildings, structures, sites, objects and potential districts in sufficient detail to permit their evaluation for and registration in the National Register.
- Usually focuses on smaller areas and includes substantial back ground research.
- Requires more communication with property owners, and may require access to properties.
- Involves the inspection of every property in the area being studied. If a historic district is being considered, it is important to record even non-historic properties.
- Usually involves archival research, including deeds and probate, print and visual sources.
- Research should include information on the history of the area, neighborhood, builders, owners and residents.

**E. Determine who will conduct the survey**

- Professional consultant, such as an architectural historian?
- Volunteers?
- Frequently the best approach is to have a combination of professionals and volunteers working under the sponsorship of a town, historic society, or other group.

Example: Hire a professional architectural historian to act as survey coordinator to work with the sponsoring organization and volunteers.

What might an Architectural Historian, serving as Survey Coordinator do?

- Train volunteers.
- Provide quality control.
- Coordinate forms, teams, geographic areas, photographs, and maps.
- Put together final report.
- Possibly oversee financial management of the project.
- Public presentations/public support.
- Interface with town officials and other concerned parties.

3. The role of the town or sponsoring group would include administrative functions, including:

- Funding / bill paying;
- Public notifications;
- Photocopying; and
- File processing

3. The role of the volunteers would include:

- Photography;
- Field recordation;
- Historic research; and
- Volunteers need to be trained so that a common language and understanding of features, style and methods are used for the survey.
- Volunteer usually do most of the field work .
- Volunteers may also do background research, publicity, community outreach or financial oversight of the project.

**F. Put together a budget and identify funding sources.**

- Identify local sources of money.
- Apply for grants.
- Fundraise.

**G. Inform the public**

- Write newspapers articles.
- Send letters to homeowners.
- Post information on local websites.
- Conduct public meetings, talks or lectures.
- Stress that the project is to gather historic information and is not about increasing taxes or levying government control.

**H. What is the finished product?**

- Survey forms: with photographs, keyed to a map. This is the raw data for future study.
- A report, booklet, tour, website, photo essay: whatever can be distilled from the raw data.
- Possible identification of resources that merit local or national recognition as a historic property or historic district.
- Be sure to determine where the information is to be kept, and in what form.